

**RICHARD A. ARENBERG**  
**Staff to Senators Paul Tsongas, George Mitchell and Carl Levin**

Oral History Interviews  
June 8, 2010 - June 10, 2010

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, DC

**Deed of Gift**

I, Richard A. Arenberg, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews between June 8 and June 10, 2010.

I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcripts at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Senate Library, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

---

Richard A. Arenberg

---

[date]

Accepted on behalf of the  
Senate Historical Office by:

---

Donald A. Ritchie

---

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	i
Interview # 1: To Congress with Paul Tsongas .....	1
Interview #2: The Alaska Lands Act .....	52
Interview #3: Massachusetts, Maine, and Michigan .....	75
Interview #4: Iran-Contra .....	122
Interview #5 A Participant Observer .....	168
Index .....	214

## Preface

On Patriots' Day, April 15, 1974, Richard Arenberg was working in his tiny office—a converted bathroom—in the political science department at Boston University, when Paul Tsongas came to ask him to conduct polls and serve as issues director for his upcoming campaign for Congress. A Middlesex County commissioner and former Lowell city councilor, Tsongas was running for the Democratic nomination from Massachusetts' Fifth District. Tsongas had been attending a Red Sox game that day, and appeared unshaven, with his shirttails out, wearing old running shoes. Arenberg's first impression of this disheveled man was that he was unlikely to win the primary, let alone beat an incumbent congressman. But he was immediately taken with Tsongas' candor. At the time, Arenberg was contemplating taking a job in Washington with Senator Edmund Muskie, but he decided to join Tsongas' campaign, at least until the primary in September. Initially, the cause seemed little more than tilting at windmills, but Tsongas won the primary and went on to defeat the incumbent and claim a seat in the House of Representatives. He then invited Richard Arenberg to Washington with him, where Arenberg stayed for 34 years.

For the next four years, Arenberg served as legislative director for Representative Tsongas. In 1978 he helped Tsongas win an upset election to the Senate, defeating the popular Massachusetts senator Edward Brooke. Stricken with cancer, Senator Tsongas did not run for reelection in 1984, and Arenberg joined the staff of Maine senator George Mitchell. From 1984 to 1987, he was Mitchell's administrative assistant. In 1987, he became Mitchell's staff member on the Select Senate Iran-Contra-Committee, and in his spare time, helped Senator Mitchell and Mitchell's Maine colleague, Senator William Cohen, write their account of the investigation, *Men of Zeal*. From 1987 to 1989, when Senator Mitchell held the title of Deputy President pro tempore, Arenberg was his chief of staff. When Mitchell was Senate Majority Leader, from 1989 to 1994, Arenberg served as his special assistant for national security affairs. After Mitchell left the Senate, Arenberg became legislative director and deputy chief of staff to Senator Carl Levin, from 1994 until Arenberg's retirement in 2009.

Richard A. Arenberg was born in Norwich, Connecticut, on October 16, 1945. He graduated from the Norwich Free Academy and attended Boston University, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1967 and a master's degree in 1976. He also served in the

U.S. Army Reserve from 1968 to 1974. From 1971 until to 1974 he was a teaching fellow in political science at Boston University, working on a PhD in political science until he joined Paul Tsongas' congressional staff. In 2009 he returned to teaching as an adjunct lecturer in Public Policy at Brown University's A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions, where he offers courses in Congress and the Federal Budget, Congressional Leadership, and Parties and Public Policy. He has been writing a book with former Senate Parliamentarian Bob Dove on the historical development of the filibuster.

On Arenberg's retirement from the Senate staff in 2009, Senator Carl Levin observed: "Rich has an encyclopedic knowledge of Senate history, procedure, and protocol. He has been a mentor to countless Hill staffers, as well as a thoughtful, reasonable, skilled advisors to the Members he has served. He is a gifted storyteller who enlightens and entertains my office with anecdotes of his decades on the Hill. And above all, he is an incredibly decent human being devoted to his work, loyal to the people around him, with a passion for life." In this oral history, Richard Arenberg shares his memories of the senators for whom he worked and the landmark legislation they struggled to enact.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie is Historian of the Senate. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford, 2005), *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (University Press of Kansas, 2007); and *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2010). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

*Illustrations:*

Frontispiece:

Left to right, Richard Arenberg, Senator Paul Tsongas, and Dennis Kanin.

Following page 93:

A Capitol wedding.

Following page 167:

Above: Richard Arenberg on the Senate floor with Senator George Mitchell.

Below: Richard Arenberg in the recording studio with Senator Carl Levin.